

COLD, RAINY WEATHER STALLS HARVEST AT URBAN VINEYARD FAMILY DECIDES TO WAIT TILL NEXT WEEK TO FINISH PICKING FIRST GRAPES

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The sun didn't shine Saturday on the first harvest of the **Balistreri** family's urban vineyard, but the weather hardly dampened anyone's mood.

"We were thinking we'd have nice, sunny California weather for our first harvest," said Julie Domenico, daughter of vineyard founders John and Birdie **Balistreri**.

"We had no idea we'd be harvesting in the rain, but we should have. This is Colorado."

About 20 family members and friends gathered Saturday morning in their four acres of **vineyards** near East 66th Avenue and Washington Street in an industrial area of Adams County.

Donning rain jackets and boots, they spent hours cutting clumps of grapes that next year will produce bottles of cabernet sauvignon and merlot. But after harvesting about 10 percent of the crop, the pickers decided to suspend the harvest until next week, when warmer weather is expected.

Temperatures overnight were not expected to be low enough to freeze the grapes.

"We weren't going to harvest this weekend, but we were worried that it might freeze hard. We wanted to get some grapes harvested," she said. "But it looks like we should be all right because there is so much moisture around the grapes."

The pickers pulled back nets covering the plump grapes and lugged plastic baskets into fields turned muddy by two days of rains. The netting protected the grapes from birds, which would have stripped the fields long ago.

"Our hands were freezing, but everyone was pretty excited. We've been waiting a long time for our first harvest," Domenico said.

The area surrounding the **Balistreri vineyards** once yielded vegetables. But the landscape began to shift from agricultural to industrial use in the early 1970s, **Balistreri** said.

The family has operated a flower business for years. Four years ago, the Balistreris decided to plant vines from California to start a vineyard. John **Balistreri** had made homemade wines for some time.

Their first wines were bottled two years ago, from grapes bought in California or the Western Slope. The family's tasting room, at 1946 E. 66th Ave., is open Saturday afternoons and by appointment.

Domenico helped her father in the tasting room Saturday afternoon, grape stains still on her fingers.

"We're all doing this for the love of the grape," she said.